

REALIZATION.

By Josephine Elyom.

They were poet and painter respectively and the artistic temperament is not always a guarantee of a happy wedded life. When Charles Plummer married Isabel Marchmont, they promised themselves an ideal state of bliss. It is more than probable that they loved each other sincerely, but a disregard of the old adage, "Bear and forbear," will discount a large sum of love, and given a little natural stubbornness on both sides, will often lead to disastrous consequences.

Such had certainly been the case with this highly strong and sensitive couple. Fifteen months together, and then the break came. They had now been living apart, without any communication with each other for nearly three months. They had agreed that their temperaments—often only a pseudonym for "temper," were incompatible, and that they were better separated. It is true that Charles had strongly opposed this arrangement when it was first mooted by his wife, but she seemed possessed with the idea and eventually in the month of November, in the second year of their married life, he agreed not to communicate with her for one whole year. At the end of that time, Isabel argued they would be quite sure of their own minds, and might talk the situation over together with a view either to the continuance of the arrangement or a re-union.

All this sounds very cold-blooded but Isabel had schooled herself to it. She had strong opinions, was very independent, extremely proud and perhaps a little foolish in a learned way. It was January, now. How dreary the days were! Short in reality, but terribly long in seeming. Isabel Marchmont—for she was professionally known by her maiden name as a painter of miniatures—was busy enough, but the things with which she was occupied did not seem to fill her thoughts or strongly hold her interest.

At present she wanted much more. She wanted something, not only to occupy her time, but to distract her thoughts and to fill up the many hours of loneliness. She was not long in making up her mind what she would do. She would put into execution a pet project—paint a picture for the Academy exhibition. She had never previously exhibited, and could not, of course, be sure that her painting, still upon the lap of the gods, would be accepted. But, at any rate, the anticipation, the careful plodding work, the planning and inventing, would be worth while, even if in the end her picture failed to gain the Academy walls. It was, however, one thing to make up her mind to paint a picture and quite another to get ready to work with a suitable subject. Everything in earth and heaven seemed to have been done. She forgot that the main occupation of painters and writers, indeed of everybody else in this working world, is the doing of the same thing in a slightly different way from that in which it has been done in all the ages.

Isabel was sitting between dusk and dark, in the pretty little boudoir of her flat, when her maid brought her a parcel that had arrived by the 5 o'clock post. She took it wearily and let it lie upon her lap, for she was so tired and miserable.

"Ah, it is from Mary!" she exclaimed, noting the postmark. The contents turned out to be an autograph album which Charles had given her on her wedding day and which had been carried off a few days later by her chum, Mary Meyers, now Mrs. Henderson, who proposed contributing one of her pretty water colors to its pages. There was a note enclosed, and Isabel, glad of something to distract her mind from thoughts that were too insistent, leaned forward to read it by the firelight.

"I am just as happy as I can be," wrote Mary. "In fact, to tell you the honest truth, Isabel, I had not thought that any mere mortal could be as completely happy as I am. You will remember those old lines about making life 'one long, sweet song'—the lines which everyone puts in every one's else album—well, that's just what John makes my life. He is so thoughtful and patient, and, though I try him dreadfully, I know—espe-

cially as he is clever and I am rather dull, unable to see the nice points in his conversation and the original view he takes of things—yet he doesn't seem to mind a bit. In fact, I sometimes think he loves me all the better for it.

"And how are you getting along dear girl? How I should like to pop in on you and your dear husband and just take stock of your happiness. I know it must be complete, almost as complete as mine, if that were possible—for, you know, your husband left the key of his heart in this very album which I am returning to you. Whether it was accidental or designed, I don't know, but, in the pages of the album, you had left the sonnet which your husband had evidently wrote, either on your wedding day or, at least, while all its sweet associations were warm in his heart. The man who wrote that sonnet is good as gold, and means what he says, because all true poetry emanates from the deep places of the nature, however much the superficial characteristics may give the lie to it. Why, dear Isabel, I think I shall show that last sentence to John! He would never believe I could write such a philosophical remark and express it so well. Really, I think he has a great deal to discover in me yet, and I shall go straight away and tell him so. Good by, dear heart. Love to you and Mr. Plummer.

Isabel only glanced through the latter part of the letter. She was too much in haste to turn the leaves of the album and find the hidden sonnet. Yes, here it was. How difficult to find, for the page in which it was inserted opened of itself. It was entitled "Wedded," and, as she read it, such a surge of emotion came into her throat that, had any one been present, he would have seen her face contorted in the firelight, and a tear, which held the red glow of the fire's heart in its center, fall upon the page.

Long she sat in the deepening gloom, the fire casting leaping shadows, behind her. The letter the sonnet written with his own hand, lay together on her lap, and her white hands, with no ornament save her wedding ring, lay listlessly upon the writer paper. She was weeping—not demonstratively, certainly, but the tears were flowing fast and unchecked, and she made no movement to wipe them away.

The very next morning Isabel commenced her picture, and she worked steadily on it every day, more or less, for two months. Since she first got her inspiration in the firelight that January evening she had had misgivings as to the originality of the subject. The greatest masters had done it. What was she that she should essay to do again what they had already done? Yet as it grew she made it her own. It was hers, hers, all hers! It was to be called "Bonds of Freedom." In the firelight, sitting backward upon an easy chair, was a man not unlike Charles Plummer. His arms were extended, and were wound about a woman who knelt cozily at his feet, while her arms were extended also, and half enfolded him in their embrace. The red glow of the fire lit up his strongly marked face, bringing out the prominent features and throwing the hollows into gloom. Only the woman's profile could be seen as she raised her eyes to look up into the face that overshadowed her, but in the expression there was that high combination of dignity and humility, of servitude and possession, which makes one woman the light of one man's life.

The picture was exhibited, of course, Isabel had a notion that a man's work had a better chance of getting through than a woman's, but that was not the only reason she chose the name George Mathers for her masterpiece. As no one knew, however, that she had painted the piece, her very frequent visits to the particular room in the Academy where it was hung would not excite comment, so she was not deterred from haunting its immediate vicinity to her heart's content. Charles would certainly come there and she prayed that she might not miss seeing him when his eyes first rested on her work. Both her prayers and patience were rewarded, for he visited the Academy in the first month and upon an exceptionally quiet morning, Isabel spied him as she was walking through the rooms to her usual place of observation. He was standing, with

his hands behind his back, looking fixedly at a poster by Mucha. She started violently when she saw him, but the lines of his face were so rigidly set and his eyes were so intent upon absorbing every detail of this impressionistic work, that she might have stood by his side with drawn veil without risk of recognition. However, she did nothing bold. On the contrary, with her heart all a-flutter and her eyes so dim—obscured by her veil and starting tears—that she could scarcely find her way, though she knew it so well, she made for the room where her own picture hung.

How inconsequential the chatter of the picture-gazers seemed to Isabel! Her own picture was never left long in the cold of neglect, but she cared not who praised or who passed it by. The world could not know that she had brought into it the yearnings and regrets of six lonely months. What a fool she had been. If she had only known! Well, she did know now that Charles Plummer was essentially her happiness. Life without him was a blank. Would he see the meaning of her picture and forgive? Would he be glad to see her, or had he found that what he once called the bonds of freedom were, after all, the shackles of servitude? Her heart spurned the thought. Charles had not been to blame, she told herself in the new-found humility of her deepened love. The fault was hers, and hers alone.

She felt, almost without looking, when he entered the room. She was glad he took first the wall upon which her picture hung, for the strain of expectancy had become almost unbearable. At last he was there—right in front of her own canvas—and what was better, practically alone. He was instantly enchanted. She saw him look quickly at his catalogue and turn over a page hurriedly to find the number of the picture. Then, for a brief space, his eyes were as keenly set upon the book as they had been upon the picture. Though she had not a catalogue in her hand, she could, in imagination, see the whole page, and follow him as he read his own sonnet—the sonnet from the album, which was printed there under the title of the picture and the painter's name:

"O bonds of freedom—Loves delightful chains—

You hold me fast whether I will or no,

Asking with ruby lips: 'And wouldst thou go?'

And laughing as I answer: 'Nay; thy reins

Have drawn me, wandering, through so sweet domains

That were I loath to leave thee—let us grow

Ever together, thee and me, and so

Make one sweet life till life's day sweetly wane.

"Hat love been alway. Yea, for now I feel

I never lived without thee—thou and I

Have surely lived and loved since e'er the wheel,

Of mystic life turned slow. Sweet wife, why, why

Should love e'er cease Oh, let me, lov'd one, seal

This raptured moment an eternity!"

As he read, the lines of his countenance softened. He looked ten years younger, and yet his mouth quivered pitiously, and, yes—it was the final triumph—a tear ran unchecked down his cheek. Isabel waited no longer, but summoning her courage, stepped across the room and laid her hand upon his sleeve.

"Charles, shall we call it November now?" she said.

"Isabel! You—and this is your picture!"

"Yes, sweetheart."

"Thank God! It has been November all the time with me, but it is May indeed now! Come, little one."

And they went out into the bustle of the street, and scarcely knew but that they were alone.

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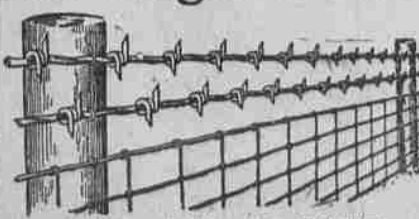
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